

One of the worst from Wanderers

Wycombe Wanderers 0, Hitchin Town 1

REPORT BY STUART EARP

IT IS 13 years since Hitchin Town last won at Loakes Park but Wycombe Wanderers gave them that long overdue victory on Saturday with one of their poorest performances for a long time.

After a promising first half hour, Wanderers could create little to trouble the visitors for the rest of the game and during the second half had just ONE worthwhile effort at goal. The inept display after half time saw many of the crowd filtering away from the ground long before the final whistle.

It is difficult to blame them. They were given precious little entertainment by the players some of whom showed a distinct lack of effort towards the end.

And don't get the impression that Hitchin are world beaters this season. Their position of third in the Rothmans Isthmian League table is due to

some fine results this season but I can't see them staying at the top for long. The reasons for their victory on Saturday were simple. They worked harder and showed a far greater appetite for the game allround. I lost count of the number of 50-50 balls they won while the last 45 minutes belonged to them almost exclusively.

It was only Wycombe's defence — and goalkeeper Peter Spittle — that kept them out until the 83rd minute when the inevitable goal came and it was particularly disappointing that Wycombe failed to mount any sort of pressure in those last seven minutes. They seemed to accept defeat without question.

So just where is it going wrong for the Blues? They have a sound enough base at the back but even the defenders were forced to struggle in the end due to the inefficiency of the middle and

front men. Whenever they lost possession, Hitchin were quick to pressurise the home back four.

Wycombe's main trouble was in midfield where none of the players were able to settle. John Priestley didn't look happy on the left while Gavin Fraser was out of touch. Up front even Ian Pearson made a good start but tied himself up too often in trying to beat defenders, while Dylan Evans was completely dominated by Tony Martin, Hitchin's outstanding player. The blond centre half had a brilliant game and hardly put a foot wrong.

At first, however, there was no hint of what was to come as Wanderers produced some nice football to dictate events for the first half hour. Pearson's skills on the ball flummoxed more than one defender while Mick

Holifield was as dangerous as ever on the left. It was Mick, in fact, who looked set to give Wycombe a 19th minute lead when he powered his way through the defence. He had only goalkeeper Brian Godfrey to beat as he entered the penalty area but Martin appeared from nowhere to pull off a marvellous tackle and save the danger.

Despite their early dominance, however, Wanderers never really got into their stride and the half was punctuated by the whistle of Slough referee Peter Wrennell who felt it necessary to pull up several players for minor fouls. He improved in the second half, however.

Hitchin gave signs of what was to come when they hit back in the last quarter of the half and Neil Bunker once beat Spittle to a high ball but headed over. Wycombe's last 'chance' of the half came when the ball appeared to hit Martin's arm in the penalty area but Mr Wrennell was unimpressed by the penalty appeals.

The visitors must have sensed Wycombe's problems at half time and I'm sure manager Andy Williams will have been quick to point them out in his half time team talk. For when his side re-appeared they played Wycombe out of the game by simply trying harder. They were determined to be first to the ball and the home side could do nothing about it.

Only Spittle's brave save robbed Peter Watson of a goal from an early second half corner and as Wycombe continued to struggle up front manager Ted Powell made the controversial move to replace Pearson, his top goalscorer, with Howard Kennedy. Clearly, neither Pearson nor the crowd appreciated the switch.

It was hardly Kennedy's fault that there was precious little improvement from the Blues. They took far too long to build their attacks and Hitchin were quick to exploit any inaccuracy in the passing. One break by Holifield brought a ray of hope but it was significant that it was only through individual skill that Wanderers ever looked like breaking the deadlock.

This, in fact, was their only chance of the half and Godfrey proved equal to Holifield's drive after a run from half way.

Hitchin, growing in confidence by the second, realised the points were ripe for the taking and mounted more and more pressure at the other end. Spittle dived full length to palm out Bunker's 74th minute header and the inevitable goal came nine minutes later. Phil Trussell's corner swung in from the bottom wing and from the ensuing scramble two of three Wycombe players had a chance to get the ball to safety. They didn't and Paul Giggie pounced to hook home the winning goal.

In the remaining seven minutes Wanderers could find nothing to test Hitchin's defence and the game petered out to an extremely disappointing finish.

WYCOMBE: P. Spittle, M. Sorenson, K. Mead, A. Phillips, R. Davies, A. Davies, G. Fraser, J. Priestley, I. Pearson (aub H. Kennedy 55 mins), D. Evans, M. Holifield.

HITCHIN: B. Godfrey, K. Hammond, R. Brimston, A. Martin, S. Gear, K. Mulken, (aub P. Trussell 75 mins), J. Wishaw, D. Archibald, F. Watson, N. Bunker, P. Giggie.

Referee: P. Wrennell (Slough).
Half-time: 0-0. Goalscorer: Hitchin — Giggie (83).

Attendance: 1,250.